

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL DEAN CLEMONS,
MULTINATIONAL SECURITY TRANSITION COMMAND-IRAQ'S (MNSTC-I) ADVISOR TO THE IRAQI
MINISTER OF DEFENSE SUBJECT: GROWING THE IRAQI MINISTRY OF DEFENSE MODERATOR:
CHARLES "JACK" HOLT, CHIEF, NEW MEDIA OPERATIONS, OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS TIME: 9:00 A.M. EST DATE: WEDNESDAY
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MR. HOLT: Okay, we can begin. I'd like to welcome you to the
Bloggers Roundtable.

COL. CLEMONS: Hello everyone. This is Colonel Dean Clemons. How are
you? I just walked in, so I'm not sure who's on. How are you all doing?

MR. HOLT: (Chuckles.) Doing all right, sir.

On the line with us we've got D.J. Elliott with the Long War Journal;
Christian Lowe with Military.com.

COL. CLEMONS: Hi Chris. MR. HOLT: We've got Jarred Fishman with
the airforcepundit; Bart Buechner out of Yountville, California.

And sir, if -- we're ready when you are, so if you are ready to begin,
the floor is yours, sir.

COL. CLEMONS: Okay, great. Well, I'm just munching on a chicken
nugget here, so bear with me.

Just real quick let me tell you what I'm doing, and then you guys can
ask questions at your leisure. I am currently the military adviser to the
minister of defense of Iraq. In that capacity I give him counsel or give him
advice. I -- think of me as like a liaison or executive officer, XO, that takes
packages, takes decisions either from him to the coalition or from the coalition
to him. And then I'm the -- I'm the person that -- I guess ostensibly I'm
responsible for assuring the consistency of the message and the guy that finds
out the elements of difference, if there is a difference of opinion, and how we
can resolve those together.

So what I find interesting about my job is that the minister doesn't
only worry about the military instrument of national power. Clearly he is
involved intimately in all the instruments of national power. And as he sits in
the cabinet meetings, I get a bird's eye view, if you will, of how they actually
are using those instruments to further Iraq, and how we as a coalition are
enabling that in some cases, providing that on the military side in some cases,
and right now, this critical time as we transition into 2009.

Is that enough to go, Jack, do you think to start asking questions, or not?

MR. HOLT: Yes, sir, I believe so. Fellas, if we can go ahead and get started. D.J. you were first online, so why don't you get us started.

Q Yes, sir, this is D.J. Elliott with the Long War Journal.

I was wondering if you could update how big the Iraqi army is supposed to be growing to. I mean I keep hearing about new brigades like the presidentials earlier this month getting into six teams already. And it's like, when did they stand up?

COL. CLEMONS: Yes. I think we're increasing the volume here just a minute, D.J., if I got your question, you're wondering how large the Iraqi army is growing over, through 2008; is that your question essentially?

Q Yes, where are they going to, because I keep hearing about new units showing up? COL. CLEMONS: Yeah. It's going to 600 (thousand), 650 (thousand) by the end of this year. That's what the -- a couple or three different analyses have told us is just about right for the COIN, the counterinsurgency fight.

So they came to that, and the minister and his staff came to that, independently. We as a coalition did a separate analysis, and got to the -- roughly the same number, and then an outside party came in, and I don't recall that name. But those three studies, if you will, drive us to about 600 (thousand), 650 (thousand).

MR. HOLT: Okay.

COL. CLEMONS: I'm sorry, D.J., did you get or -- ?

Q Yes.

MR. HOLT: Okay, and Christian.

Q Is that -- this is Christian Lowe from military.com. Colonel Clemons, is that just quickly, is that 650,000?

COL. CLEMONS: Yes. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, yeah.

Q Okay.

COL. CLEMONS: You know, by the end of 2008 we'll be right up at the 580 (thousand) mark. So that -- we're going there.

Q Okay. Question here. In the email that we got sent on -- sort of highlighting this talk today, I don't know who wrote this, but in it it says the topic that you will talk about will be the support equip -- support, equipment, training, development, sustainment, force management and budget, so that the Iraqis will be prepared to counter internal threats by 2012 and external threats by 2018 to 2020 on their own.

Now that sort of jumped out at me because that seems like a long time from now. You're saying another four years before Iraq can counter internal

threats on its own, and another -- and another 12 before they can counter external threats. Can you--

COL. CLEMONS: Yeah. That is taken directly from the minister himself. When he -- when we -- actually I was with him actually when he went to the states recently in January. And that's what his testimony to members on the Hill by -- with the exclusion of those -- those enabling logistics ISR aviation maintenance, he believes he will be fully capable of doing internal threat until 2012, and then the external with some of those same enabling capabilities and -- actually some of the combative capabilities as well for 2018-2020.

So that is -- that is not something that I'm pulling out unilaterally. That is in fact what he has -- he has stated in his testimony. Q And how do you get there from here? What -- what -- what -- what sorts of things do they need? And how is that ramping up? What's the schedule on some of those things?

COL. CLEMONS: The -- the piecemealing is on the COIN element of this for the direct combat piece, and that's -- that's clearly what we're building as we stand up to individual -- we -- now when I say we, this is coalition and Iraqi. There's -- there's very little done in isolation on either side of this equation.

So when I say we in this case, I mean collectively we're moving towards that. So all the divisions and brigades that were mentioned earlier are standing up immediately, then you're seeing the move to the training element, to the logistics side, the base support units. And then a far out look -- think aviation, which in fact takes a, you know, considerable number of years to purchase, acquire the proper ISR platforms and the support platforms. Does that give you a little better picture of it?

Q Sure. And that means we'll have to be involved with this process all the way until at least that timeframe, the 2012 for internal, 2020 for external?

COL. CLEMONS: Yeah. Well, we'll have to continue looking at it. You know, are we going to make a unilateral decision? You know, that's for other parties to -- to, you know come to. Being the military member, obviously, my emphasis is on doing the national will on the military instrument.

So if in fact we as a nation stay committed, those are the type of capabilities that we will -- we will continue to provide for them.

Q Roger that. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: All right. And Jarred.

Q Yes, sir. Can you take a few minutes and just give us a rundown from your experiences, what you've seen over there in the last several weeks to months about the progression of, as I will call it, the bureaucratization or the institutionalization of everything that you deal with as far as -- because we know that training is going to be important. The ability of units to go through and to feel that they are part of a one unified Iraq. Just from your on-the-ground perspective, as you're right in the middle of all these disparate events occurring, what kind of progress have you seen as far as tying them all into one country where we'll be able to continue to draw down and let them kind of move on and come to that unique independent state by 2012?

COL. CLEMONS: Yeah, that's a -- that's a terrific question. It's -- it's a difficult one to answer, but it's a terrific question.

Now, understand I am a MNSTC-I asset. So we are -- you know, we are about three things here: generating the force; replenishing the force; and -- and finally creating institutional capacity. So I think what you're asking me falls in that domain of ministerial capacity for long term. Is that safe to say? Is that what you're looking -- you're asking me to answer?

Q Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

COL. CLEMONS: Okay, I see dramatic progress -- some of this is cultural in that where we -- where we would take a process or a problem set, if you will, and impose a process as we -- as we decipher, pull apart the different -- the different elements necessary for success. You know, we might very well start in the -- the -- in this case in the COIN, but we would also pick up logistics and the -- the different enabler pieces of this. And I think that's what's growing dramatically in the last few months.

As it gets -- as the security -- and I think the minister would say this as well; in fact, I've heard him say something analogous to this -- the security and stability that's been present and getting more robust everyday, I might say, is now driving this understanding across the GOI -- GOI, Government of Iraq -- all the ministries acceptance that now is the time to strike on services, a process improvement, establishment of everything from electricity to oil distribution.

So it's been real heartening for me as I -- as I've had this bird's eye view to see that integration and be incorporated across the -- you know, the entire GOI. And as MNFI does their -- you know, consistent -- you know, hand in glove with the ambassador, and that review is done every six months. So this is really quite exciting.

And I only just got here in the first week in November, and I can -- I can tell you from personal experience that that -- that pendulum has swung for a grander more clear understanding of the needs and the requirement to do just that.

Is it exploding out of the gate? I would not say exploding out of the gate, but the horses are running, and it's really quite exciting. Does that answer your question?

Q Yes, sir, and I'll have a follow up later. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

COL. CLEMONS: Okay, sir.

MR. HOLT: And let's see, someone else online? Somebody else joined us?

Okay, well, we could just open it up for follow up questions then. So Jarred, go ahead.

Q Okay, thank you, sir. Well, just continuing in that vein, obviously we are seeing the positive trends on the battlefield throughout the country, you know, in 100 different sectors. But to follow up what you are

saying, is there the human capital involved where there's an expertise level where we can either train them or we can bring people back who have had the jobs before where they can actually run the system, and it's not just going to fall to pieces the minute we don't have Americans teaching them what to do? I mean is there something where we are actually building ministries where yes, they can get out and do financing and planning and logistics, and they actually have people who know how to do all these different kinds of things.

COL. CLEMONS: Oh, yeah, super. It -- it is exciting to see in that before, you know, using the old adage, you know, give a man a fish and, you know, you haven't really accomplished much; teach him how to fish, you know, and things are much better. I think that's -- we are right in the throws of handing the pole over in some cases, so they know how to fish. In some -- in some cases that are more esoteric, you know, we're still bringing the fish to them and will be for some time.

Some capacities where they just need raw equipment before you can begin the sustainment and logistics and training element. And even to the part of the equipment element, that has yet to be done in some avenues.

But, principally, the transition to -- to sitting back in -- I'm an Air Force guy, so sitting in the co-pilot seat if you will as opposed to flying the plane the -- you know, that is happening daily at a ministerial level to include budgeting, finance, those type of things.

And if you look at expenditure with a MoD as we look at their ability to force generate through funds, through some -- either you know direct contract or foreign military sales, there's an understanding of those processes which may have been foreign as little as two years ago, and the acquisition piece, the -- the -- I'll even go so far as as subtle things like reconciliation that -- that is -- is extraordinary to hear the language around tables, where it was -- it may be perhaps in the past more sectarian. Now it's reaching out to -- to all parties and all groups to have a collective understanding on the way -- the movement ahead within Iraq.

It's really -- it's really quite exciting. And people in some cases where they would have been pounding tables are now -- there's a great degree of tolerance and acceptance of those around. So just -- just to see that's neat, and then some of the -- the rule of law elements, the economic development; an understanding that the -- as services go, and as services -- demands on services rise, how we're going to do this collectively, and do we in fact have the ability to hand off from the coalition to the Iraqis, and they're taking it on, and clearly the coalition, all members of the coalition are delighted in what we're seeing. There's work to be done. You know, this is not going to happen completely in 2008. But, you know, you could probably make an argument that we in the U.S., you know, are still -- still struggling in a democracy after 200-plus years.

So it's neat for a -- for all of us in the military, and those that are diplomats, both you know in the U.S. and around the world who are helping these people at this point to take that back seat, and say -- and go into an applaud mode -- and very nicely done.

So yeah, it's -- that's probably the most exciting thing about me -- about my feelings towards it. It's just -- it's just neat to see, guys. It really is.

Q Colonel Clemons, it's Christian Lowe again with military.com. I have another question for you, Jack, if we have time.

MR. HOLT: Yeah, go ahead.

Q Last week we spoke with Lieutenant Colonel Mashalik (sp) who does -- I'm probably butchering the pronunciation of his last name, but he does a lot with the foreign military sales in MSNTC, and he mentioned something I'm wondering if you have any bids on. He mentioned the acquisition of heavy artillery by the Iraqi army, and that there was some resistance to that, and that they are sort of pushing that acquisition off for awhile. I'm wondering if you can tell me why. Is there some fear that the U.S. would be helping the Iraqi army build an external capability, an external defense capability too quickly? I wonder what sort of the back story is on -- on maybe efforts to hold them back a little bit?

COL. CLEMONS: I'm -- I'm not aware of that issue. The -- there is a priority deck, different priorities. And there -- it's something we all struggle with. Okay, that's a nice priority requirement -- requirement deck with priorities. But how does the budget -- you know, how does the budget support those different sets of priorities.

So it might be something as simple as, in this case, that it's lower on the priority list, you know, for those things that are directly more -- more germane to the close up fights. I'm -- you know, I can't really refer to it. Actually I'll turn to Dan here. Dan may know the question better here, so.

COL. WILLIAMS: Yeah, this is Lieutenant Colonel Williams, the public affairs officer. Addressing the issue of the artillery and some of the other enablers that Colonel Clemons was mentioning, there is an order of priority, and there is a level of training and expertise that we don't have here, and that they don't have available, and so we're going with the priorities that they have established in order of priorities.

So top priority right now is still filling the COIN force, getting the operators, the maneuver forces filled; getting the command and control; and then working from there through the logistics piece. And then we can get to aviation. Engineering is the next one, and artillery, fires.

One of the more difficult ones is aviation. So going from simplex to complex it kind of has an order of priority, and it's not one we've placed on them but it's one they've come to a realization of.

Now they'd like to have some of these other combat enablers because it would give them a quicker response time and a better ability to adjust to external threats. But right now the external threat's not the biggest issue, it's the internal and that's what we're focusing with them on based on their priorities for the COIN fight.

Q Okay, thanks Lieutenant Colonel Williams, but back to you, Lieutenant -- or Colonel Clemens.

COL. CLEMONS: Yes.

Q How much of this -- I -- there -- I guess a better way of asking the question is have there been occasions when you have had to sort of advise in your liaison role -- advise the MOD, "Look maybe you might want to look at a

different priority here because you should focus on the counterinsurgency and with this acquisition or this force-building, you're looking more at external threats"? I mean, --

COL. CLEMENS: Yes. We've -- I have done that personally and in often cases, I'm carrying the message of both the Iraqi staff and the collation staff as we look at the different shifts. And as in most priority list -- you know, it does in fact change on the threat in the environment, too. You know, at one time we didn't -- there's very little consideration -- just a real quick anecdote here. There's very little consideration of having women suicide bombers. So -- you know, building a capacity to -- having -- you know, women that could -- or -- that can search other women, that was -- you know, very little thought of in days of old.

So even that simple example kinds of gives you a sense that things do, in fact, change. But principally, the advice that we're giving is reviewed and quantified and prioritized consistent with what they believe is right. And what we've seen is more desirable in some cases. Some -- in some cases, I would say it's a desire. Would we, if we were going to do it, have, you know, a COIN fight in Tennessee, it'd probably be a little different. But yeah, I think I have advice on that and certainly my leadership in General Petraeus and General Dubik advise on it routinely.

Q Okay, thanks.

And you do have to look out for those Hatfields and McCoys, I guess.
(Laughter.)

COL. CLEMENS: Yes.

MR. HOLT: All right.

Does anybody -- anyone else?

Q I got one.

MR. HOLT: Okay, D.J.

Q D.J. Elliot again. I was wondering -- according to the Kurdish press, they've been talking about a couple of Peshmerga divisions transferring to the Iraqi Army as part of the budget deal. Is that still going or is that still up in the air somewhere?

COL. CLEMENS: Yeah. The mix and shape for the -- not only the Kurds, but different sects, if you will, on the Arab side -- that is shifting as we speak. Then there is consideration of trying to make it appear -- you know, divisions appearing less sectarian for the area that they are. And there is some disruption in that and there's some consideration for it. But the training percent of different ethnicities and sects is really on the forefront of the plate. And it's probably not a daily review, but it's certainly on the table on a weekly and monthly basis. So yes, there's -- Peshmerga's -- is definitely thought of as is Sunni-Shi'a mix.

Q This is Bart Buechner in Yountville.

Just to follow up on that, is there -- were there any wrinkles in the last couple of weeks internally there on the visit by the Iranians or is that just kind of a course of business? It made a little bit of a splash over here.

COL. CLEMENS: The -- is -- I think -- now are you talking from the coalition side or are you talking from the Iraqi side? There's a little of difference on both.

Q Yeah, I'm more interested in the Iraqi side.

COL. CLEMENS: It was welcomed in some areas, just as we might and some areas kind of raised a brow over. But -- you know, being on the MOD side, what I saw more than anything is the force protection element --

Q Yeah.

COL. CLEMENS: -- and the politicians, if you will, were, you know, doing the political element of it. So my personal view is more on force protection, and when I say force protection, we're talking protection of the -- (Audio difficulty.)

Q Sir, the question kind of on the same pattern with the Peshmerga forces is aside from actual numbers coming in, clearly the biggest challenge we have is making sure that we have one unified command structure of Sunnis, Shi'as, Kurds, Turkmen, whoever. And so could you perhaps talk a little bit to the point about how we think strategically getting the funds of Iraq involved, getting all the different parts involved so that everybody falls under one command structure and can work well with each other, and that we won't be dealing with this problem five years from now?

COL. CLEMENS: Yeah. That -- you know, that goes right back to what I was saying earlier. There is deliberate, concerted thought to do -- to doing just that so we don't have these ongoing rifts in the command structure. The -- now currently, the division of the country is pragmatic in a sense that -- less based on different sects and more based on the practical nature of conducting war. So there are in fact the different headquarters that are established and some of that's geography. Some of it's capability and some of it's the training pipeline to move equipment and adjust the divisional support. So yes, that is clearly on the fore in -- as we proceed -- both as we proceed on the coalition and as we -- coalition Iraqis proceed. They are absolutely committed to doing it.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And -- all right.

Got just a few seconds -- a few minutes left here. Anything else? Any other follow-ups? All right. Colonel Clemens, if you've got any closing thoughts for us, go right ahead.

COL. CLEMENS: Well, I -- the -- I guess my one closing thought would be the surge element. I think what's often overlooked -- maybe in the States -- is that this is not a coalition or U.S.-only surge. Being near and close to the minister -- you know, he talks of, "Okay, you all surged 30,000 and I surged 125,000." And, you know, when he says "I," he means Iraq. So this is huge and their ability to grow their own, fight with their own -- and they've been doing this. You know, they're surging while they're establishing democratic principles. They're surging while they're in the middle of a COIN fight. They're surging why -- while they're -- you know, losing some of their folks to

martyrdom. This is really quite impressive and they're doing all this surge, and they're building the government, which is exciting to see.

The -- it's really a compressed timeline for success and I'm just -- frankly, I'm extraordinary proud of what we've done as a coalition and in many ways near and dear to my heart is -- I'm proud of what the Iraqis are doing in this -- you know, wonderful country of theirs. So it's going to be exciting to come back. I was telling the minister the other evening, actually, it's going to come -- exciting to come back. My son is 9 years old and to come back, you know, before he leaves high school and vacation here because these guys are absolutely committed to doing this. It's really quite something.

Those are my closing thoughts.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much.

Colonel Dean Clemons, the Multi National Security Transition Command of Iraq's -- advisor to the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, thank you very much for being with us today, sir and hopefully we can speak again in the near future.

COL. CLEMENS: Okay, Jack. Take care.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you, sir. COL. CLEMENS: Thank you.

END.